

Visiting Livingstonia, 1910–1914: Some Visitors and Their Attitudes

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On 15 April 1912, the Titanic sank. On that day the Revd Thomas Napier, minister of Stichill United Free Church near Kelso in the Scottish borders, was deep in Nyasaland, now Malawi. On 5 May he wrote home to his wife Jeannie that he had just heard of the ‘terrible disaster of the Titanic’. Nyasaland was distant, it had taken him the better part of six weeks to get there, but its isolation was beginning to decrease; the news had taken less than three weeks to get to him.

This paper uses Napier’s diary, some 50,000 words of it, and his letters home to look at Africa through the eyes of a visitor in 1912 looking at his attitudes and those of others who visited the missions there.¹ Nowhere does Napier write any criticism or analysis of what he saw. All the documents are fairly superficial and uncritically supportive of what he witnessed. He did write a report on the Livingstonia Mission, but the home committee told him it was neither his job nor theirs and invited him to send it to the Mission Council at Livingstonia. Its arrival there was acknowledged by Dr Laws, but it does not figure in any of the literature on Livingstonia nor is it referred to anywhere, which implies that it had limited impact if any.

In 1912 Thomas Napier was forty years old and had been minister in Stichill for thirteen years. He had been brought up without a fixed attachment to a particular denomination; his parents had been married in the independent Blackfriars Church in Glasgow

¹ These documents are in the possession of the author, who is the grandson of Thomas Napier. Further references will appear as ‘T.M. Napier, Journal or ‘T.M. Napier, Letter to x’ with the date.

and they variously worshipped in both Congregational and Episcopal Churches in the USA. Back home, Tom found a home in the United Presbyterian Church, trained in divinity and served as an assistant in the slums of Dundee before being called to Stichill and going with the rest of the U.P. Church into the United Free Church in 1900.

In the context of the United Free Church nationally, Tom Napier was perhaps the right person to send. He had a long-standing interest in missions, and was a supporter of Mary Slessor's work in Calabar in West Africa. The congregation in Stichill supported two of her orphan girls and Mary Slessor herself stayed in the manse there on at least two occasions.

Napier, of course, was not the only visitor to the Livingstonia and Blantyre missions at about this time. At least three others visited and published their impressions, so his unpublished account can be placed in the context of those others: Charles Inwood, a Methodist, visiting in 1910 and publishing an *African Pentecost* in 1911; Norman Maclean, a future Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, visiting in 1911 whose book, *Africa in Transformation*, was published in 1913; and, closest in background to Napier, James H. Morrison who visited in 1914 and published *Streams in the Desert*, a book of lectures about his trip, in 1919.² Morrison is of particular relevance because he was undertaking the same task as Napier had done two years previously, travelling as a deputy from the United Free Church of Scotland. Morrison was minister in Falkland in Fife and, by the time he went to Africa, was the author of *On the Trail of the Pioneers, a sketch of the Mission of the UF Church of Scotland* (1913).

The visit of Inwood in particular had been followed by useful publicity at home, where *African Pentecost* became an instant success. More than that, in Nyasaland itself letters from the

² Charles Inwood, *An African Pentecost: the record of a missionary tour in Central Africa*, (London [1911]); Norman Maclean, *Africa in transformation* (London 1914); John Horne Morrison, *Streams in the desert, a picture of life in Livingstonia* (London 1919.)

missionaries had reported a ‘remarkable spiritual awakening’ following his visit. The gatherings of Africans who came to hear Inwood at four locations were counted in the thousands, 7,000 at Loudon, more at Bandawe, 6,000 at Ekwendeni and nearly as many at Livingstonia itself. Some of those listeners took on an apocalyptic fervour with an expectation that Dr Laws would return from furlough in Scotland with an army to slay followers of the Watch Tower Movement.³ As a result the missionaries were reported to be struggling to manage expectations in follow-up meetings and fulfilling the wishes of those who had gone to them for education. The emotionalism of Inwood’s visit was not seen as universally helpful by all missionaries, although it was part of an ongoing tradition of revivalism in the area.

Dr Laws, leader of the Livingstonia mission, was keen to welcome an official visitor from the United Free Church.⁴ In his biography of Laws, W. P. Livingstone wrote:

The Doctor had often wondered why his own Church did not send out a deputy; in his closing address to the General Assembly he had referred to the value of such a visit. He endeavoured to lure out one correspondent by pictures of wild life. ... Through the liberality of a notable friend to missions, a deputy in the person of the Revd T. M. Napier, B.D., was sent out and brought an alert and sympathetic mind to bear on all he saw.⁵

Thomas Napier was the first official ‘deputy’ from the U.F. Church to Livingstonia. Each year Dr Alexander Miller, minister at Buckie,

³ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875-1940* (Blantyre, Malawi, 2000) p.263.

⁴ Despite the Livingstonia Mission having been a Free Church enterprise, Dr Laws was a member of the United Presbyterian Church when he became leader. In 1900, the Free and UP Churches united into the United Free Church.

⁵ W. P. Livingstone, *Laws Of Livingstonia; A Narrative Of Missionary Adventure and Achievement* (London, 1923), p. 345.

and Convener of the United Free Church Foreign Mission Committee, provided the money for two deputies to visit a particular mission. In return for this funding, Napier had to give fifty talks about the mission within two years of his visit, mainly within his own Synod of Merse and Teviotdale; there was, however, no suggestion that he should produce any form of critique of the mission.⁶

At this point though, the Livingstonia Mission was in no way under the direct control of the United Free Church. The basic support for the Livingstonia Mission had always been a group of Glasgow businessmen. This group was dwindling although it had offered to join Livingstonia to the mainstream of United Free Church Missions in 1901, the church declined the offer and kept it at arms' length until 1913. This was largely because of the perceived pressure it would put on general church resources. As a result, the Livingstonia Mission Council in Livingstonia felt isolated from the church at large. Feted for the achievements of its staff, the mission was not getting the financial support it needed, particularly after the death of people like James White of Overtoun in 1908 led to a substantial decline in its income. The Blantyre Mission, and indeed Scottish missions in general, was also suffering financially in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the words of one historian: a small minority of congregations contained within them minority groups who supplied the support that allowed this work to go ahead.⁷

Thomas Napier left on 17 February 1912, the sole deputy. Despite every effort, no other minister was prepared to leave Scotland for the prescribed six months. This was particularly disappointing for two reasons. The first was the success, already

⁶ 'J. Fairley Daly to T.M. Napier, 20 December 1911', in Livingstonia Committee, *Letter-books of the Secretary of the Livingstonia Committee in Scotland, 1901-1934*. Published in microform by Adam Matthew Publications and available at the National Library of Scotland

⁷ Andrew Ross, 'Scottish Missionary Concern 1874-1914: A Golden Era?', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 51 (1972), 52-72.

described, of Charles Inwood's visit in 1910, the storm of revival it created in Nyasaland and the way it raised the profile of the mission back in Britain. The second was that the unwillingness of others to go made manifest the failure of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 to raise enthusiasm for the work of mission throughout Scotland. There is an echo of this in the fact that after the Edinburgh 2010 Conference no Scots could be found to fill three advertised posts for World Mission. John Morrison, the second deputy, was only found two years later, in 1914, and again was sent out alone.

Arrangements were made for Napier to travel out with a group of missionaries and he was given the opportunity to meet them before he went, or at least five of those going out to Livingstonia. The rest of the party was going to the Church of Scotland mission at Blantyre.

His shipboard letters from *RMS Kenilworth Castle* describe how 'Dr Elmslie has given me a native grammar so that I may have some little idea of the language spoken over a considerable part of Nyasaland. However I shan't take that very seriously'.⁸ Maybe he did not take it seriously, but he did find himself baptising adults in both the Chitumbuka and the Chitonga languages which were apparently similar enough that he commented that he had to watch that his 'tongue wouldn't get fankled'. Both he and Morrison were to learn a smattering of the local languages as well as the formulae needed for the mission services.

Three weeks later he was in Cape Town, homesick, very homesick at times, as his letters show, but also absorbing all that was happening around him. While in Cape Town he was introduced to David Livingstone's brother-in-law and marvelled at the range of peoples passing; 'English, Dutch, Kaffirs, and Malays, There are also lots of

⁸ T.M. Napier, Letter to Jeannie Napier [wife], 19 February 1912

Jews and Chinese'.⁹ He also commented on the growing signs of apartheid:

There is a small cemented pool here in which the children wade. It is marked 'paddling pool for European children'. I mention this as an instance of how the race question obtrudes itself everywhere in South Africa. In Capetown, the native is allowed to use the sidewalk but I am told this is not so elsewhere.¹⁰

Some local expatriate Scots he described as most hospitable, though, like most colonials, not strong on Church or Missions.

The word 'Kaffir', quoted above, is now actionable as an ethnic slur in modern South Africa, but at that stage was used unthinkingly, as the 'normal' word for a black person there and in fact was the header term for the native peoples of South Africa in the 1911 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Normally, when writing to his four year-old-son, Napier consistently refers simply to black people or black children. His normal usage in both diary and letters was 'natives', sometimes 'boys', and once only, in a letter home, to 'Sambos'. This last term never was anything other than demeaning and it is hard to see why it should have been used in this instance. It should be noted, however, that even then, the implied superiority in referring to black men as 'boys' was beginning to give offence. Charles Domingo, at one stage a licenced black preacher of the Livingstonia Mission, for example, complained 'White fellows have been here nearly 36 years and not one of them sees the native as his brother, but as "his boy"'.¹¹

⁹ T.M. Napier, Letter to Jeannie Napier, 8 March 1912.

¹⁰ T.M. Napier, Journal, 5 March 1912.

¹¹ Quoted in Kenneth P. Lohrentz, 'Joseph Booth, Charles Domingo, and the Seventh Day Baptists in Northern Nyasaland, 1910-12', *The Journal of African History* 12 (1971), 461-480, p. 475. Born in Mozambique, Domingo was educated in Livingstonia Mission but left in 1908 because he felt he was being held back from ordination. After a brief sojourn in the Watch Tower Movement, he became a

Napier's successor as deputy, James Horne Morrison, did use the word 'nigger' twice, in both cases quoting white people whose attitudes he condemned. In the one case he quoted a fellow passenger's speech with great distaste on seeing a body floating in the River Shire:

Four gay young spirits, such as Britain has too often sent out to exploit the lower races of the earth, were at the moment busy playing poker. One of them, overhearing the remark, turned half round 'A nigger or a dog?' he jerked out over his shoulder. 'Well, demmit, what's the difference?' And he planked down another card. Missionaries of Empire! Apostles of Civilisation! Alas for the land that sends you out, and, yet again, alas for yourselves who are sent!¹²

Although Morrison did, it has to be said, refer to Africans as being among the 'lower races', he also paid tribute to their work ethic:

These men had travelled 140 miles in five days, crossing and recrossing twice a range of mountains 6000 feet in height. For this they received the magnificent sum of 2s. 4d. (approx 12 pence) each, including 6d. for food money. It seems a rare commentary on the parrot-cry about the greed and incurable laziness of the African.¹³

Napier's comments on the African's coaling the ship were that they worked hard and steadily, more so than the average British workman and consistently through his whole time in Africa he paid tribute to their capacity for work and their honesty.

Moving from the initial attitudes which the visitors showed towards the black population; one attitude that may come as a surprise was the general attitude to Islam: specifically the fact that a

Seventh Day Baptist and a significant leader in that church. He was perhaps one of the three most influential black figures in Malawi at that time.

¹² Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 9.

¹³ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 44.

group of missionaries would seek out a mosque. The group had arrived in Durban on a Sunday, so there was no worship on board ship. It was too late to find a church, so Dr Elmslie of the Livingstonia Mission led a party of nine, six women and three men, to a mosque and they stood at an open window watching the evening prayers.

The prayers were led by an old man who would chant a sentence, and then prostrate himself on his face, the rest, about fifty, following him. But there were various exercises. Sometimes they would all stand, kneel or bend prone, in silence for a long time. One couldn't help feeling it impressive and curiously it satisfied me somewhat as suggesting something of worship on the sacred day.¹⁴

Was it a sign of the influence of Annie Small and St Colm's College that it was the women missionaries who were in the majority in seeking out the mosque?

Perhaps we should not be surprised by that recognition.¹⁵ Certainly missionaries in Nyasaland were very aware of Islam, largely as a rival claimant of local souls, for the Muslims were also missionaries, but also as potential slavers. The Episcopalian missionary of the UMCA in Nyasaland, Archdeacon Johnson, was an Arabic scholar and carried a Koran with him. His biographer, however, reckoned that Islam, as taught in Nyasaland was 'truly a bastard form of the faith that worked such wonders in Arabia and Northern Africa ... and had none of the virtues as may be allowed to exist in the genuine faith of Islam'.¹⁶

¹⁴ T.M. Napier, Letter to Jeannie Napier, 12 March 1912.

¹⁵ For the connection with the philosophy of St Colm's College and Annie Small I am grateful to Arlene Finlayson's paper to the Scottish Church History Society conference in October 2012.

¹⁶ Bertram H. Barnes, *Johnson of Nyasaland; a study of the life and work of William Percival Johnson, D.D.* (London, 1933), p. 126.

If that was true it might explain Napier's description of the mosques of Kota Kota (now Nkhotakota) thus:

The village is the largest I have seen. There are three Mohammedan houses of worship; small dirty brick erections (the bricks were supplied by the government) as this is the centre of Mohammedan influence, and a large section of the population profess Islam. It was a centre of the Arab slave trade.¹⁷

Carrying on consideration of the Muslim theme, Napier had further contacts. On his way home, he skirted the east coast of Africa before sailing through the Mediterranean. On 19 July, after leaving Mombasa, he noted: 'There are three Mohammedans in the saloon who sit at a table by themselves. One is a Mr. Mandi who was imprisoned in South Africa for seditious speeches.'¹⁸ A few days later he wrote: 'Had a talk tonight with Mr. Bhandu the Mohammedan. He was quite ready to discuss Islam and Christianity. I regret that I did not take an earlier opportunity for conversation. he and his companions leave at Suez on their way to Mecca as pilgrims, thence to Jerusalem'.¹⁹ If Napier and his travelling companions were showing willingness to talk to Muslims, what then of Christians of other persuasions? Nyasaland was rather a honey-pot for missionary organisations in 1912. Although Scottish tradition allots the lion's share of missionary endeavour to the two Presbyterian missions inspired by Livingstone, there was also the Anglican 'Universities' Mission to Central Africa' which also took its inspiration from Livingstone. Besides them there was a Dutch Reformed Church mission from South Africa, the Industrial mission founded by Joseph Booth, the Seventh Day Baptists, two Roman Catholic organisations and a growing indigenous church.

¹⁷ T.M. Napier, *Journal*, 20 June 1912.

¹⁸ T.M. Napier, *Journal*, 19 July 1912.

¹⁹ T.M. Napier, *Journal*, 30 July 1912.

Napier had contact with several of these, and the very matter-of-factness and casualness of the account suggests an acceptance of each other's work. The Church of Scotland's visitor at Blantyre the previous year, Norman MacLean, had gloried in the fact that the two Presbyterian Missions were on the road to union and had always stood on good terms, but Napier did not seem to be particularly interested in this aspect. So far as the Anglican mission was concerned, Napier was happy to worship in one of its churches, although disappointed that his offer of conducting a service in the little used church at Fort Johnston was summarily dismissed.

The UMCA largely took on the east side of Lake Nyasa with some other stations, so there was not, at least in theory, actual territorial rivalry between them and the Presbyterians. Generally relations were good despite fundamental differences. Archdeacon Johnson, the doyen of Church of England missionaries in east Africa, was a close friend of Dr Laws and recognised that they were perhaps two of a kind. Their friendship lasted from 1881 until Johnson's death in 1928. Nonetheless, in one of Johnson's letters, late in his career and life, he put it quite plainly 'Let us pray together but not communicate outwardly, till our Lord opens the way'. Johnson would and did attend Presbyterian communion services while visiting Dr Laws in 1927, but without participating, and later celebrated the sacrament with his servants in his own room.²⁰

Napier ignores this aspect, while Maclean meets it head-on commenting that the UMCA was not only unwilling to enter into discussion with the Presbyterian churches but was quite prepared to encroach on the spheres of interest of what it described as non-conformist churches. This was a phrase at which Maclean, high-Church of Scotland as he was, took great umbrage, ending his diatribe with 'The attitude of the Universities Mission is not only alien to the spirit of Christianity and inimical to its interests, but is

²⁰ Barnes, *Johnson of Nyasaland*, p. 200.

directly contrary to the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference; the voice of the worldwide Anglican Church’²¹

Taking a different angle, Morrison described a UMCA service in the following terms:

We joined at evensong in chanting the ‘Magnificat’ in Yao as best we could, but as we strove to follow the service, the elaborate ritual of which was only half-intelligible to us, we could not help wondering what the handful of natives behind us were making of it. [...] After the benediction the chanting died away in the vestry, and one rose saddened that such mysterious formalities should be thrust in, as it seemed unnecessarily, between a primitive people and their God.²²

Meanwhile Maclean himself had heard an Anglican missionary similarly deploring the way in which the Roman Catholic fathers not only denied his holy orders, but more seriously troubled the Africans by their attitude. Napier only once met Roman Catholic Missionaries.

Noticed a tent some distance away, and a white-haired lady. Proved to be of the Catholic Mission at Kayambi. After dinner, Mr McMinn and I went over and found two French nuns and had a conversation with them. They are on their way down country and have not gone before. They were very courteous and grateful for our visit.²³

If that was laconic, Napier’s awareness of the most interesting group, the Industrial Mission shows only a lost opportunity. During their stay at Blantyre on their way to Livingstonia, the Livingstonia missionaries, Miss Hart and Miss Ballantyne, visited the Zambezi Industrial mission – again possibly showing Annie Small’s

²¹ Maclean, *Africa in transformation*, p. 163.

²² Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 23.

²³ T.M. Napier, Journal, 30 May 1912.

influence, perhaps. Napier did not visit the mission.²⁴ The Zambezi Industrial Mission had been the brainchild of Joseph Booth. It aimed to train Africans to be effective in the industries they were likely to be involved with rather than provide a broader education, so literacy and numeracy were less of a priority although not ignored entirely. Booth himself was rather a maverick but is now seen as a major figure in the development of African Christianity, of an African Church geared to the needs of Africans and ruled by Africans. In his own theology he was, at that time, a Seventh Day Baptist whose views were not mainstream in any way. He consistently alienated potential financial backers by going off in directions that they were not comfortable with. Booth had long since been banned from Nyasaland but his influence was still present. In 1912 two Americans, Wayland Wilcox and N. O. Moore, were sent across from the Seventh Day Baptists to report on missionary methods. Unfortunately, although Napier referred to the Wilcox and Moore as being at Liwonde, when he stopped off there on his way home, he does not appear to have had any conversation with them. This is a pity as their report critiqued the attitudes to 'Industrial Missions' among the various (unnamed) denominations and made an argument that 'the training needed by the average native is one which will help him to help himself to live a better life in the environment of his own village', rather than an education which only equipped them to be teachers or interpreters in what was inevitably a limited market.²⁵ A different argument was put forward by Norman MacLean who thought that an industrial mission was limited by its very commercialism and by the need for it to be near commercial centres rather than where the need for the mission was. In a clear criticism of Booth's methods, he criticised missions that depended on an individual missionary without a society or church behind him, but he

²⁴ T.M.Napier, Journal, 26 April 1912.

²⁵ Wayland D. Wilcox, 'The need of Industrial Missions in Africa', *The Biblical World* 41.2 (1913), 103–8, p. 108.

also reiterated Wilcox's point that an industrial mission was in a position to undercut local commercial enterprise and that made for unjust competition.²⁶

So what did Napier and Morrison actually do when they were in Livingstonia? Each came via the Church of Scotland mission in Blantyre and started at the southern end of the Livingstonia mission-field. They then worked their way up country right to the north, going into what is now Zambia. Each of them covered 700 or 800 miles in Livingstonia mission territory. A little of that was travelled on bicycle and little was travelled on foot, but the greatest part of the journey was travelled in a machila. At first both men felt awkward about being carried by the Africans, but they were made to realise that the Africans could carry them much more quickly than they could walk.

Napier and Morrison each travelled to many mission stations. Napier records how often he was asked to preach or take part in services, recording texts or themes. In the middle of May, for example, Napier records the following activity. On the Sunday he went to the catechumens' class at seven in the morning when he addressed the members after the lesson. At ten he spoke at the service for natives on the topic 'he is able'. This was followed at three by Sabbath-school where he gave an address on 'power'. Finally he conducted a service in English at seven in the evening, when he preached on 'the Cross and that the Crown'. The following day was a travelling day. He left with Dr Innes, the local missionary, at ten and got to Deep Bay at six in the evening. This was a relatively short journey, some days they travelled for as much as fourteen hours. The following morning, Napier and Innes examined the school. Napier spoke to the students on the Christian testimony at Antioch. This was a deliberate policy because the local chief was showing signs of returning to what was then described as 'heathenism'. They then travelled for four hours and had another

²⁶ Maclean, *Africa in transformation*, pp. 112–113.

service, with Napier preaching on Luke. After another two hours travelling Dr Innes then passed Napier across to Mr McKenzie. After a picnic, Napier preached on Psalm 139.

On the following day two hours travelling was followed by a sermon in a local church on John 4. After breakfast they travelled till two. Then he preached again and continued travelling, arriving at Karonga for tea. Then he spoke to two or three hundred on Galatians 2.²⁷ And so the weeks went on. The longest day's travelling started at half past three in the morning. They did not stop for lunch till eleven, and were thirteen hours on the road in all. On that occasion, Napier walked or rather trudged for ten hours. At the end of it he attended a service in the school, but could not take part as there was no interpreter.

Later when staying with Dr Laws, he found Laws' work rate to be punishing and the Doctor expected the deputy to keep up. 'On Monday I was with Dr Laws from six in the morning till after five at night going into the business of the mission, books, forms, schedules and so on until my head was like a bees skep'. The two days later he described taking theological classes from six till twelve, going over ledgers with Dr Laws, discussing educational aspects with Mr Kirkwood, a prayer meeting at four and then two hours of evening school from seven till nine.²⁸

Clearly preaching and addresses were a considerable part of the deputy's task; sometimes he preached to fit the circumstances of the community he was visiting after having been primed by the local missionary. Sometimes sermons came straight from the heart: after finding the body of a woman killed in a 'muavi' ordeal²⁹ Napier wrote

²⁷ T.M. Napier, Journal, 19–23 May 1912.

²⁸ T.M. Napier, Letter to Margaret Knox [sister-in-law], 12 June 1912.

²⁹ 'Muavi' was an ordeal used to identify witches; the accused was made to take a specific poison; if they vomited it up they were adjudged innocent, if they did not, they died.

However we held a service in the new wattle and daub church. There was a large attendance. I preached on Revelation 6; 10 having to give utterance to the horror I felt and so made my subject the sins of heathenism: falsehood, unchastity and superstition.³⁰

The services were often in local languages with his sermon translated. Morrison spoke of one service where the interpreter translated from English into two languages in turn and none of the three was his native language. Hymns too could be in several languages. Again, Morrison reported:

Memorable also was that last camp for the singing. There were hymn-books among us in five dialects, and all of them contained the grand old hymn 'Let us with a gladsome mind Praise the Lord for He is kind.' We made it our concluding psalm of thanksgiving for all the mercies of the way. Five times over each verse was sung, each time in a different dialect, while the whole company woke the forest echoes with a united chorus.³¹

Both men were impressed by the singing and found the African music both beautiful and reverent. Much of the hymnology was written in local languages sung in the local idiom.

The praise is led by a native precentor with the aid of a small organ. The women, to all appearance, are the most backward portion of the audience. Many of the hymns they are unable to join in, but when an old favourite comes they make ample amends for their previous silence. Their singing would delight an Auld Licht congregation by its patriarchal slowness. The precentor beats time with exaggerated energy, the men shout and glare scornfully across the church, but the women, having found a good thing, have no notion of letting it go. Thoroughly enjoying themselves, and unconscious of any fault, they

³⁰ T.M. Napier, Journal, 12 April 1912.

³¹ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 149.

hold on lovingly to each note, and after the men have finished the verse, they come leisurely wandering along the last line.³²

That was one of Morrison's comments, Napier had a less patronising description:

The whole [service] was in the Nyanja tongue, though one of the hymns was in Yao.... This, the first native service I have seen, impressed me greatly, especially the singing of the hymns, most of the children's hymns in Yao. The natives have rich voices and it is good to hear them sing.³³

There are various other comments through the diary about the singing he heard. Another recurring theme is the place of dance in African society. At one point it is described as evil and a sign of heathenism. Cullen Young had anthropological interests and became a recognised authority on Ngoni culture. When Napier went with him to watch dancing he accepted it as local colour.

A feature of both Napier and Morrison was their total trust in the men who accompanied them. On occasion both were quite alone and were travelling with a group with whom they had no common language and in some cases the bearers were even described as heathen. Yet at all times they felt completely safe. Morrison wrote:

Therefore, life and property are safe in Central Africa, safer far perhaps than at home. A white man's life is certainly safer. It might be supposed that the traveller who plunges into these forests runs some risk of being swallowed up and lost. In reality it would be easier for an elephant to go amissing on Hampstead Heath, than for a white man to disappear in British Central Africa. His passing is an event of public

³² Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 29.

³³ T.M. Napier, Journal, 24 March 1912.

importance. From village to village he could be traced, and if he had done and suffered anything, it would all come out.³⁴

This leads on to one of the longstanding issues about the education of Africans in the early twentieth century. From their own experience, the missionaries knew the men they were educating were clever, committed, capable and highly motivated. Despite that, Moore and Wilcox reported:

It is Mr MacAlpine's [one of the Livingstonia missionaries] opinion, and that of every other white man with whom we have talked in Nyassaland [sic] that the native is at present entirely incapable of civilized self-government, and that it is useless to try to conduct a missionary enterprise without the presence of a white man to supervise the work.³⁵

Clearly this represented the kind of attitude that had alienated Domingo.

Despite the good qualities seen by the Mission staff, many, perhaps most, of the white settlers saw Africans as sly, venal and lazy. Partly this is attributed to the fact that students who left the mission schools because of bad behaviour were still seen as mission boys. Even so there was still a gap between the colonists' view of the African and the missionary view. Morrison visited the copper mines of what is now Zambia and wrote, perhaps simplistically:

Here black and white meet, and together constitute the problem of the boys on the mines. Strangely enough, in our other colonies and in America, the word boy is a name of honour.... But here, on the contrary, in presence of an inferior race, the name 'boy' has been

³⁴ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 110.

³⁵ Moore and Wilcox Report, as quoted in Kenneth P. Lohrentz, 'Joseph Booth, Charles Domingo, and the Seventh Day Baptists in Northern Nyasaland, 1910–12', *The Journal of African History* 12 (1971), 461–480, p. 474

degraded and become a name of servitude. The boys are the natives, and they are supposed to constitute the sole problem. It seems to be forgotten that the whites also are boys, many in the first flush of youth, and they constitute a moral problem as grave and momentous as the other, and one that ought to lie nearer to the Church's heart.³⁶

Elsewhere he wrote:

The colonial mind is enmity against Missions. The subject is regarded as one not to be calmly considered, but to be dismissed with contempt. The colonial is a splendidly fine fellow, but if there is one subject about which he is in abysmal ignorance it is Missions. It may be said with perfect confidence that not one in a thousand of colonials has ever examined the operations of even a single Mission station. Missionaries have their weaknesses and Mission methods their faults, but the colonial has not discovered them. His attack is delivered in the dark.³⁷

This gap between the missions' and the settlers' attitudes resulted in a serious tension which continued. This can be seen clearly in Morrison's comments about some of the settlers that he came in contact with. And sometimes you feel that the government resources were used to referee between the two sides. Having said that, the African Lakes Company, also known as 'Mandala', which was a commercial venture, was usually seen as being on the side of the missionaries. Mandala was in fact closely connected to the missions and a financial supporter. If relations were cool between the Scottish missions and the settlers, Booth's actions in placing his industrial mission close to plantations where mission input was not allowed had been seen as confrontational. Yet relations between the missions and government could be strained too. Morrison reported:

³⁶ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 164.

³⁷ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, pp. 168-9.

Some time before our visit, an imaginative traveller, having penetrated thus far into the wilds, returned to civilisation with strange tales of a Governor's Council where pompous majors strut and pose, while missionaries of fabulous age and wisdom sit stroking their snow-white beards. This effusion, when reported in Zomba, generated enough heat to keep the luckless Mission in warm water for a twelvemonth. Happily, the truth is that in few countries are Government and Mission on more cordial terms.³⁸

This was a reference to Norman Maclean's description of the legislative Council.

We smile at the natives, their vanity, their rings in their lips and their buttons in their noses. Pleased with so little. We are nothing better. There they sit. A row of medals, a ribbon or two, wigs, gaiters; how we strut! [...] And Dr. Laws strokes his beard with a gleam of amusement in his eyes. He sees through it all. Zomba is deceiving itself into thinking that it is administering Nyasa. Dr. Laws knows that the true administrator is Mandala.³⁹

It has to be said though that Norman Maclean's underlying philosophy was that Scots were supreme at everything over all other peoples and should be allowed to rule the world.

One topic that was of great importance to the missions in 1912 was the growth of what was called 'Ethiopianism'. This was a form of religion that had grown when men left the missions and developed their own form of worship largely as a reaction to the slow pace of African advancement within the mission context. It was believed at the time to incorporate aspects of traditional religion to the detriment of Christianity and was seen as a real threat by the missions. Nowadays it is more likely to be seen as the beginnings of indigenous African churches, but Napier and Morrison both accepted

³⁸ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 20.

³⁹ Maclean, *Africa in transformation*, pp. 65–6.

the contemporary mission view of Ethiopianism as undesirable. Napier was asked to preach against the Ethiopian tendencies and spoke in disparaging terms of Ethiopian church buildings which he saw. In Dwambazi he recorded that he 'spoke to the adults on I John, 3; 6 in opposition to ethiopianism of which Dwambazi is the centre'. One of the reasons that Africans from the mission school went into the Ethiopian church, was simply that they not seen as equals in the eyes of the Scottish church.

Morrison tells the story of all the Kirk session meeting when one African elder was arguing. 'The Presbytery, he said, had already settled the law of marriage. Upon this Dr. Elmslie started to his feet. 'It is not the Presbytery that has made the law, It is the law of Christ 'Mazghu gha Christu' he repeated in the native speech, with a passionate vehemence that silenced opposition'.⁴⁰

It cannot be doubted that Laws could be despotic, his own colleagues would vouch for that over a period of years. Morrison seemed to admire the 'grand old man' persona of Dr. Laws, Napier did not comment. If Morrison appeared to approve of that approach we do know that when the tactic was used, it led to the withdrawal of one of the most able committed and articulate of those who had come up through the mission school and his later association with the Ethiopian movement. With the exception of Joseph Booth, none of the missionaries ever seem to have a good word for Ethiopianism. Morrison's comments are typical:

The Ethiopian movement, with its watchword of 'Africa for the Africans,' has proved troublesome in Central as well as in South Africa. But the Scots missionary, far from encouraging, has done more than any other agency to combat and restrain it. In this he has had the steady support of the leaders of the native Church, who are shrewdly wise in taking the measure of these agitators.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, pp. 47-8.

⁴¹ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 57.

And yet there was some evidence of mutual contact with the breakaways, for Napier knew that the Ethiopian leaders in Usisya were appealing to Livingstonia to help stop local dancing, which was seen as a reversion to heathenism.

One of the most articulate statements of Ethiopianism to have appeared by the time that Napier and Morrison visited came from the other side of the continent, from what is now Ghana, and the pen of J. E. Casely Crawford:

[The colonizer] with the gin bottle in one hand, and the Bible in the other [...] urges moral excellence, which, in his heart of hearts, he knows to be impossible of attainment by the African under the circumstance, and when the latter fails, his benevolent protector makes such a failure a cause for dismembering his tribe, alienating his lands, appropriating his goods, and sapping the foundations of his authority and institutions.⁴²

The only writing that Napier actually published about his visit was for the women's missionary magazine of the UF Church. He entitled it 'The Women of Livingstonia', and it looked at both the good side and the bad side of a woman's life as he saw it, drawing also on the experiences of women missionaries to get the general picture

Two of the negatives, in particular, affected him. One was the first-hand experience of seeing the corpse of a young woman killed by having to undergo the 'muavi' ritual for finding 'witches'. This experience fuelled his hatred of some of the characteristics of what he called 'heathenism'. He refers to 'the drum whose muffled beat, so horridly suggestive – summons to the evil dance, and the sins of a people sunk in moral insensibility is flaunted to the sky'. But if this reaction reinforces the modern stereotype of missions a century ago, one can imagine the gasp as the reader of 1913 read of 'things to be

⁴² J. E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* (London, 1911) p. 165.

whispered, bringing a blush to the cheek of him who speaks and of him who hears'.⁴³

But Napier's anger is also against the inequalities that he sees in African society and the ignorance he sees there. Woman was, as he saw, probably anyone can still see,

'the passive subject of a system which imposes on her the hard toil and burden of life, from which men are exempt. It is her lot to labour; and all the heaviest work is hers, hoeing and reaping, braying and sifting the flour, carrying water, making roads, building huts, cutting and carrying grass for thatch. Frequently one sees her bearing a load which might tax an ox or mule, and so often with a baby slung also on her back.'⁴⁴

The second issue which deeply affected Napier was seeing a woman feeding her 18-day-old baby with maize gruel, or taking water for the home from a stagnant pool where she had just washed was made the more helpless by the realisation that many of the most fatal diseases came from impure water and that four out of every five children died. This dose of realism, however, reinforced his commitment to the kind of educational programme that was then developed for the girls and women of the mission.⁴⁵

In this context, the education of women, of whatever age, was a matter of pride and of praise for women workers in the field. This too was a theme of his article. That two native women should be among those leading prayers in Bandawe he saw as entirely appropriate and something to celebrate. Some of his other anecdotes might seem to be patronising to modern eyes, but his attitudes to Africa must be taken in the context of the attitudes he already held of Scottish society, for there is no suggestion that the women mission

⁴³ T. M. Napier, 'The women of Livingstonia', *The Women's Missionary Magazine of the UF Church of Scotland* 150, (June 1913), p 125

⁴⁴ T. M. Napier, 'The women of Livingstonia', p. 123

⁴⁵ T. M. Napier, 'The women of Livingstonia', p. 123

workers were equal to their male counterparts, rather that they had their own – extremely important, but specific – role in the work of the mission.⁴⁶

Did the visitors change through their journeys? Possibly only superficially: they came with an admiration for the work of the missions which remained with them, and indeed became enhanced, especially for Napier. They came with an attitude to the Africans that was positive but paternalistic, and that remained, but with added respect for the commitment, the skills and the faith of many particular individuals. They sometimes presented themselves as slightly self-important. It was interesting that Morrison recognised the danger of feeling his status inflated as a result of the welcomes they received:

After one gets used to it, however, every other form of welcome seems tame and cold. When one goes on to other tribes and is received in silence, one feels distinctly slighted. They ought to have screamed at the sight of us, these senseless people. Nothing short of a universal uproar, we feel, is worthy of our august presence.⁴⁷

All visitors, it has to be said, went away with a huge respect for the work done by the mission and the sacrifices made.

How kind the missionaries are I feel ashamed to receive so much goodness and to be able to make so little return. I am deeply impressed with their work and their utter unselfishness in doing it. They are good people. Their disabilities are great but the results of the work are wonderful. Just think of a parish of nearly 4000 square miles, with 200 villages directly influenced by the mission. Such is Kasungu. Round these villages the missionary goes on 'Ulendo' For their schools he makes out the scheme of lessons, supervises 166 teachers, tends the sick who wait his coming, meets with those taught for baptism and I do

⁴⁶ T. M. Napier, 'The women of Livingstonia', p. 126

⁴⁷ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 77.

not know what all; and all that besides the work of the centre. It is marvellous. I wish the critics at home could see what I have already seen.⁴⁸

On the completion of his visit, Morrison was caught up in the declaration of the First World War and his homecoming was fairly chaotic. He moved to Aberdeen in 1917, but also served with the YMCA in France.

Morrison had seen, as Napier had not, the dangers of industrialisation and the sapping effects of the Africans' recruitment to the mines:

And these same boys go down to the mines and become so much native labour. They mix in the Babel of the compound, their history and character are unknown, their individuality is lost. All that is taken account of is so much black skin sheathing so much valuable muscle.⁴⁹

Morrison recognised that Livingstonia and most of the other missions simply were not tackling the situation adequately. But his writing was done many months after the event, written as lectures for the troops amongst whom he served. Part of the tone of his book is coloured by his anti-German feelings. Napier's writings were written without the benefit of a period of reflection and simply record what he saw on the day.

Napier never left Scotland again. Four years after his African trip he moved from his tiny Borders church to industrial Hamilton, and later to Partick in Glasgow, before retiring due to ill health and dying in 1939 at the age of 67. Throughout the 1930s his home was always open to a large number of foreign students studying in Glasgow, so much so that a neighbour warned his wife of the

⁴⁸ T.M. Napier, Letter to Jeannie Napier, 24 April 1912.

⁴⁹ Morrison, *Streams in the desert*, p. 145.

dangers of allowing his daughter to be in contact with so many Africans and Indians.

Stirling

